

Collins (S.)

REPORT

ON

PAUPER INSANITY;

PRESENTED TO

THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE,

ON MARCH 28TH, 1845:

BY

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Dr. STEPHEN COLLINS,

Chairman of the Committee.

29886

BALTIMORE:

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1845.

YOUTHFULNESS AND YOUTH

RE P O R T.

The joint special committee, appointed to inquire into, and report on, the number, condition and wants of the Insane Poor in the Alms-house of Baltimore city and county, have bestowed on the subject a most careful consideration, and submit the following

RE P O R T:

Your committee have ascertained that there are in the Alms house *seventy-three* insane paupers, viz :

White men,	23
White women,	35
Coloured men,	4
Coloured women,	11
Total,	73

Of this number, twenty-eight are foreigners by birth; fifty are from the city; fourteen from the county; five from the eastern shore of Maryland; one from Prince George county; one from Vermont; one from Annapolis; and one from New Orleans. Ten of the whole number are idiotic, or subject to fits; and some, particularly among the women, are old and harmless, and cannot be cured.

The annual cost for the support of each insane pauper is about sixty-five dollars. The nurses and attendants of these patients are selected from the temporary inmates of the house; but, although this arrangement diminishes the expense, it also greatly reduces the chances for desirable curative results. No part of the treatment of the insane has more intrinsic importance than the personal, mental, and moral character of nurses and attendants—a statement that will be duly appreciated by those who contemplate the nature of insanity. How, then, can it be possible to treat successfully cases of pauper insanity, when the nurses and attendants are selected from the establishment, with the necessary exclusion of a proper regard to qualifications?

The next subject for the investigation of your committee is the condition of our insane poor who are confined in the alms house. A

careful examination has produced the most unqualified conviction that the trustees, the physicians, and the manager have done all that circumstances would allow for the comfortable accommodation of this most unfortunate class of the inmates of the establishment. The cells, although in a crowded condition, are comfortable and neatly kept; and if this most pitiable class of our citizens were placed beyond the reach of hope that any plan of medical treatment could ever restore them to the free light and air of heaven; to the enjoyments of the domestic and social relations; to the discharge of the active employments which constitute the duty and the happiness of man; to the rational worship of the Great Father of us all who smites, and who alone can heal, and who opens his ears to the humble penitent, whether he bows down in lowly adoration and confession in temples built by the hands of man, or offers his sacrifice on the altar of the great temple of nature—*then* your committee would have had nothing to do but to drop a sympathising tear at the pitiable and hopeless condition of suffering humanity.

In 1840, Dr. A. C. Robinson, one of the attending physicians, presented to the board of trustees an able report on the lunatic department, in which he says, “Although medical skill is very important in the management of these peculiar disorders of the nervous system, it is no less necessary that, when confined, the apartments of the patients should be well warmed, lighted and ventilated; their personal comforts studiously regarded, and their morbidly sensitive minds gently checked and soothed by experienced, intelligent attendants, whose “considerations of convenience” should always be subservient to the probabilities of cure. The architectural unfitness of this building for the accommodation of lunatics need not be argued. It was not originally designed for their habitation, and does not now afford the means of either secluding or classifying them, according to the intensity or peculiar features assumed by their maladies.” It is a fact universally admitted in the present age, that Alms houses are so little fitted to the accommodation and cure of insanity as to be regarded as sepulchres, in which the mind is entombed almost as hopelessly as in the solitude of the grave; and therefore your committee will dwell no longer on this subject for their investigation. If any member of the City Council have any doubts on this subject, let him visit the institution, and walk, as your committee have walked, through the cells, which are the receptacles of this *living death*, and his heart, while indulging in thankfulness at his own exemption, will melt in tenderness and be bowed down in sorrow; and, unable to scan the mysteriousness of the dispensation which has allowed the disturbance of the harmonious action of the immortal mind, he will “wait the great teacher, death, and God adore.” If a man could look without emotion on the chained occupants of these lonely cells in their returnless banishment, the very stones in the walls would upbraid him for his inhumanity.

Your committee have now arrived at the last subject of investigation, viz: the *wants* of the insane paupers of the Alms house. As this subject, so interesting to humanity, has never before been presented in detail to the City Council, your committee claim your kind indulgence while they present, as briefly as possible, the considerations which have forcibly impressed their own minds.

Until the closing decade of the last century, insanity was considered an incurable disease; and mental philosophy and medical science were equally uninformed as to its nature and treatment. It was supposed to be inflicted as a judgment of heaven in consequence of the commission of crime; and therefore all efforts to effect its removal would be unavailing. Your committee will not wound your sensibilities by expatiating on the employment of chains and stripes, and various other cruelties which were deemed the proper antidotes for insanity; nor draw the picture of the poor maniac manacled and bound in his filthy cell in which humanity should not have allowed a wild beast to be confined, and where, having lost almost every feature which distinguishes his nature, the feeble rays of returning reason were inevitably extinguished in the impenetrable gloom of an endless night. Humanity draws the veil over this most pitiable scene of mortal woe; and records her vow that enlightened and philanthropic efforts for the future shall atone for the ignorance of the past.

In 1792, the elder Pinel, like an angel of mercy who had come down from heaven on an errand of love, having obtained permission from the Commune of Paris to test his medical views of insanity on the patients at the Bicêtre, entered the dreary cell of an English captain who had been chained for forty years, and had killed an attendant with his manacled hands; and, having first addressed to him words of kindness, and obtained a promise of submission, knocked off his fetters. The man walked about the house and grounds; and surveying the expanded sky exclaimed "how beautiful." In two years he was cured and discharged. The case of Chevigné was equally decided. In the course of a few days the shackles were removed from *fifty-three lunatics*, and the furious madman renounced his habits of violence; cleanliness and decency succeeded filth and nakedness; and tumult and disorder were displaced by tranquillity and harmony. Thus was consummated the glorious triumph of modern mental science over barbaric ignorance, and the rays of this risen sun are now penetrating to every dark corner of the civilized world. In no well conducted asylum for the insane are chains and stripes and other cruel punishments any longer inflicted. The inmates have various employments and amusements, and are stately assembled for religious worship. Europe and America have erected hundreds of large hospitals for the cure of diseased minds. Public benefaction and private philanthropy have combined to produce this benevolent

result ; and now, at the close of half a century since Pinel entered the Bicêtre, a jubilee might justly be held to commemorate his deeds.

Having indulged in the expression of their views in relation to the humanity of suitable provision for the insane poor, your committee will now consider the subject in its economical relations. It has been demonstrated that, when appropriate medical and moral treatment are combined, insanity yields as readily, if not more readily than ordinary acute diseases. But it is necessary, for the production of this result, that the patient should receive early treatment, and under the most favorable circumstances. Nine out of ten are restored when patients are properly treated within three months from the first attack ; thirty-five in one hundred in old cases ; and eighty-one in the hundred, taking the aggregate of all cases. Where the disease is of more than two years continuance, the proportion of cures is only as fourteen to seventy-nine. It will thus be seen that the prospects for cure diminish with the continuance of the disease ; but cases of long duration are not to be deemed hopeless unless there be functional disorder, indicating the existence of organic change of the brain. Economy, apart from humanity, will lead us to subject the pauper insane to early and effectual remedial treatment, by which their speedy and permanent recovery would relieve the public of their support ; rather than confine them in the Alms house where they may pass long and dreary years in hopeless, remediless imbecility, or raving insanity. Idiocy, and insanity connected with advanced years, afford little promise of cure by human power. In such cases, the disease of the mind will probably continue during its connexion with the body. It is only when the mighty hand of death shall have struck the blow which separates the material from the immaterial, that the soul, starting fresh as from a second birth, will rejoice in the exercise of its noble, undecayed, and immortal powers.

a It is with great reluctance that your committee feel constrained, by the limits to which they are of necessity confined, to bring this report to a close. The subject would expand into a volume ; and he is the true friend of humanity who extends the knowledge of these beneficent achievements of modern medical science. It is thus that the exercise of beneficence confers a double blessing ; it blesses him who gives, as well as him who receives. If we open our hearts to the pitiable condition of the insane pauper, we may humbly trust that, when our time of sorrow and afflictive dispensation shall arrive—and that hour may come—we will receive the favor of Him who has said, “Blessed is he that considereth the poor.” That class of the afflicted poor, in whose behalf your committee make this earnest appeal, present themselves before you, and exclaim, in the beautiful and pathetic lamentation of Job, “Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends ; for the hand of the Lord hath touched me.” Unless we provide proper accommodations, and means adapted to effect

their cure, their derangement will be confirmed, and the only release they can ever obtain will be found in the grave.

Your committee would gladly recommend, if circumstances would justify the recommendation, that Baltimore should imitate the noble examples of other cities, and provide an asylum for her insane. The State has expended \$103,000 on the Maryland hospital; and it may well become a question whether she should not accommodate there at least the *curable cases* of her insane poor. By a resolution adopted during this session of the City Council, the city counsellor has been requested to prepare a memorial to the legislature on this subject, which will be presented at the next session; and your committee, confiding in his ability and philanthropy, leave the subject with him. Your committee can only recommend, for the present, a provision for the worst case of insanity in the Alms house. Nine such cases are now in the establishment, viz: six from the city, and three from the county. Your committee applied to the trustees from the county to remove their three cases to the hospital; and have obtained a promise of compliance. This will make six patients to be transferred to the hospital by the city; the cost for whom will be, in compliance with a law of 1839, one hundred dollars each *per annum*. The State has now thirty-nine insane poor in that institution at this cost; thirteen of whom are from this city. The six additional patients are chained, or have been chained for years, because the nature of the accommodations in the Alms house does not allow their liberty. In the hospital every fetter would be immediately knocked off. Your committee regret that they have not space to give, in detail, a case from Carroll county. She was, of necessity, chained by the leg for *three long years*, in a cell 8 feet by 12. Dr. Robinson, physician to the alms house, deeming her case curable, applied to Dr. Willis, of Westminster, to have her removed to the hospital; and she was removed by the commissioners of Carroll county. Every chain and other restraints were immediately taken off on her entrance into the hospital, and in *three months* she was almost cured, and performing various services in the institution. From the long continuance of her confinement in the Alms house, her complete and permanent recovery may not now be effected; a result which Dr. R. thinks would have been certain had she been taken, when first attacked, to the hospital. No words your committee could write would add to the forcible appeal made by this simple recital. Many years since, and before the present enlightened mode of treatment was adopted, when Mr. Hudson became manager of the Maryland hospital, he found a man who had been chained for five years, under circumstances too revolting to be detailed. His promise of obedience was obtained, and, as the key had been lost for two years, his chains were knocked off, and he was soon restored.

In conclusion, your committee recommend the adoption of the subjoined resolutions.

STEPHEN COLLINS, *Chairman.*

Resolved by the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore, That the trustees of the poor from Baltimore city, be and hereby are directed to remove, or cause to be removed, to the Maryland Hospital, the following insane patients now in the Alms house of Baltimore city and county, viz: Ann Danes, Mary McCardle, Mary Munroe, Amanda Jackson, Margaret Colder, and Mary Bullen, *alias* Mary Brashears.

And be it further resolved, That for the support, for one year from the time of their admission, of said insane patients in said hospital, at the rate of *one hundred dollars per annum* for each patient, the Register be, and hereby is authorised and directed to pay, in quarterly payments, the sum of *six hundred dollars*, or so much thereof as may be required, to the order of the President of the Board of Visitors of said Hospital, out of any unappropriated money in the treasury.